

Message Text

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ACTION HA-02

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 ISO-00 IO-06 NSCE-00 SS-14 INR-05
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O 091538Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9079

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 22776

LIMDIS

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: SREF
SUBJ: ALLEGED MISTREATMENT OF CAMBODIANS IN THAI REFUGEE
CAMPS

REF STATE 200615

1. IN ANSWER TO THE CHARGES IN THE POTENTIAL ANDERSON COLUMN, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT POLICY SINCE MARCH 1978 IS TO ACCEPT THE ADMITTANCE INTO THAILAND OF ALL INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES. LOCAL OFFICIALS, WHO EXERCISE A GREAT DEAL OF LATITUDE, HAVE INTERPRETED THIS POLICY IN DIFFERENT WAYS, BUT THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT EVEN LOCAL OFFICIALS HAVE SINGLED OUT THE CAMBODIANS FOR ANY SPECIAL OPPROBRIUM. EVEN WHEN THE MORE RESTRICTIVE RTG EXCLUSIONARY POLICY WAS IN EFFECT, ROUGHLY FROM 15 NOVEMBER 1977 THROUGH FEBRUARY 1978, SEVERAL PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS AND DISTRICT OFFICERS REFRAINED FROM FORCING REFUGEES BACK ACROSS THE BORDER.

2. INITIAL TREATMENT OF A REFUGEE, REGARDLESS OF HIS
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ETHNICITY, THUS VARIES A GREAT DEAL DEPENDING ON THE LOCATION WHERE THE REFUGEE IS PICKED UP AFTER ENTERING THAILAND. THE RTG JAILS MANY REFUGEES AS ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FOR THE FIRST FEW DAYS OR WEEKS AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL IN THAILAND. DISTRICT JAILS ARE SELDOM ELABORATE, BUT THAI PRISONERS SHARE THE SAME QUARTERS. IN MANY INSTANCES, DISTRICT OFFICERS

HAVE PERMITTED REFUGEES TO CAMP ON THE GROUNDS OF DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS RATHER THAN IN A JAIL CELL.

3. THE THAI MILITARY DO NOT RUN THE ARANYAPRATHET CAMP. THE CAMP IS ONLY SIX KILOMETERS FROM THE BORDER. THERE IS A NEARBY MILITARY POST, AND THERE ARE FREQUENT MILITARY INCIDENTS BETWEEN KHMER AND THAI ALONG THE BORDER IN ARANYAPRATHET DISTRICT. KHMER FORCES HAVE ROCKETED THE TOWN OF ARANYAPRATHET, AND EXTREME TENSION FREQUENTLY REIGNS IN THE DISTRICT. THERE HAVE BEEN ISOLATED AND RARE INSTANCES OF THAI MILITARY BRUTALITY AGAINST A FEW REFUGEES IN THE ARANYAPRATHET CAMP.

4. THE UNHCR FIELD REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE KHMER CAMPS SAYS THAT THERE WERE IN THE PAST REPORTS OF A SMALL NUMBER OF UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCES OF NEWCOMERS FROM THE ARANYAPRATHET CAMP. THE UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE INDICATES THAT EARLY IN 1978 EIGHT PERSONS REGISTERED IN THE CAMP WERE TAKEN BY MILITARY PERSONNEL. DESPITE PERSISTENT UNHCR REPRESENTATIONS, NO SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION WAS RECEIVED. SINCE THAT TIME, THE UNHCR REGIONAL REP SAYS THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NO FURTHER REPORTS OF ANY SUCH INCIDENTS, AND OVERALL, THE THAIS HAVE BEEN CLEARLY ACCEPTING CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN LINE WITH PM KRIANGSAK'S POLICY. THE ONLY RECENT INCIDENT OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE WAS A MISSING GIRL IN MAY, 1978. NEWSPAPER CONFIDENTIAL

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SPECULATION WAS FIRST THAT THE THAI MILITARY MAY HAVE ABDUCTED HER, BUT LATER RUMORS WERE THAT SHE MAY HAVE LEFT VOLUNTARILY WITH A BOYFRIEND. HER PARENTS WERE EMIGRATING TO AUSTRALIA, AND SHE MAY NOT HAVE WANTED TO GO ALONG.

5. THERE WAS ONE RECENT INCIDENT IN ARANYAPRATHET WHERE THAI SECURITY OFFICIALS SEARCHING FOR A REFUGEE OPENED FIRE ON THE REFUGEE WHEN HE TRIED TO FLEE AND KILLED HIM. UNHCR INVESTIGATION OF THIS INCIDENT DETERMINED, HOWEVER, THAT THE THAI HAD GROUNDS FOR TRYING TO APPREHEND THE REFUGEE, WHO WAS A CRIMINAL.

6. THE UNHCR-SUPPORTED REFUGEE CAMP AT SIKHIU IS USED PRIMARILY TO HOUSE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES. THERE IS A JAIL ABOUT ONE KILOMETER AWAY, ALSO IN SIKHIU DISTRICT, WHICH HAS LONG BEEN USED FOR COMMUNISTS, PRINCIPALLY SUSPECTED HARD-CORE CADRE AMONG THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WHO ENTERED THAILAND STARTING IN 1946. DURING 1977 AND 1978, THERE HAVE BEEN TRANSFERS TO THE SIKHIU JAIL OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES FROM UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMPS WHEN THOSE REFUGEES HAD BEEN SUSPECTED OF SUBVERSION,

BREACHES OF CAMP DISCIPLINE, OR OTHER FORMS OF TROUBLE-
MAKING. CONDITIONS AT THE SIKHIU JAIL ARE MUCH HARSHER
THAN AT THE UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMPS. BEST ESTIMATES ARE
THAT THERE ARE PERHAPS 70-80 KHMER AND ABOUT 100 LAO
REFUGEES THERE.

7. WHEN THE RTG ADOPTED THE NOVEMBER 15 EXCLUSIONARY
POLICY TOWARD NEWLY ARRIVING REFUGEES, THERE WERE INSTANCES
IN WHICH REFUGEES WERE TURNED BACK AT THE BORDER, MAINLY
WITH LAOS. SINCE ABANDONMENT OF THE NOVEMBER 15 POLICY,
THE RTG HAS BEEN ACCEPTING BOAT AND LAND REFUGEES.
PRESENTLY THE CHIEF PROBLEM FACING KHMER REFUGEES
ENTERING THAILAND (OTHER THAN THE RIGORS OF ESCAPE FROM
KAMPUCHEA) IS THAT THEY ARE ON OCCASION TAKEN FOR MILITARY
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INFILTRATORS AND THUS RUN A RISK OF BEING FIRED ON BY
THAI SECURITY FORCES. THIS PRACTICE, HOWEVER, IS NOT
STANDARD. THE RECENT ARRIVAL OF OVER 300 KHMER REFUGEES
AT THA PHRAYA, NORTH OF ARANYAPRATHET, HAS MET WITH A
GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC RESPONSE FROM LOCAL AND CENTRAL
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9080

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BANGKOK 22776

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8. WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT DIVERSION OF UNHCR AND

OTHER RELIEF COMMODITIES DESTINED FOR THE REFUGEE CAMPS
IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM. UNHCR FIELD REPRESENTATIVES
MONITOR THIS SITUATION CLOSELY.

9. THIS PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT IS BASED ON SOMETIMES
SKETCHY INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE UNHCR AND THE
EMBASSY. WE ARE VISITING THE CAMPS REGULARLY. WE WILL
BE ALERT TO ANY FURTHER INFORMATION WHICH MIGHT BEAR
ON THE ANDERSON ALLEGATIONS, AND WILL ENCOURAGE THE
UNHCR TO DO LIKEWISE. WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING
TELEGRAPHICALLY TEXT OF CONGRESSIONAL LETTER SO WE CAN
BETTER ADDRESS THE SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS RAISED.
ABRAMOWITZ

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